

# HISTORY OF WOMEN INMATES

A Report for the Criminal Justice and Corrections Advisory Council

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## HOUSING

Between the years 1871 and 1889 there were only two women incarcerated in the Prison facility at Deer Lodge, Montana. They were housed in the original Territorial Building, on the third floor. The other floors were used to house male prisoners.

In 1889, a brick building, 18 x 24 feet in size, was built to house the women who were imprisoned in Deer Lodge. This building was used until 1895.

In 1895, a large building was built at the Western end of the prison yard. This building was used as a dining room and a hospital, and the North end was used to house the women prisoners.

In approximately 1907, a separate unit was build to house the women. This building was erected outside the main wall, and a wall enclosure was also constructed. This unit was used until 1959, when it was converted into a maximum security facility for male prisoners.

From that time to 1963, women were housed over the Warden's garage. In 1963, women were moved to the "Old Laundry" building, which was also behind the Warden's house (present day Board of Pardons), next to the garage. In 1966, the basement of the Guard's Quarters was used. This included several maximum security cells for Administrative Segregation. (This building is currently the Powell County museum).

By 1970, this facility was used only for holding prisoners prior to transport to York, Nebraska or to Warm Springs. In 1975, Warm Springs apparently was used as a holding facility prior to transport to Nebraska or California. In 1977, the facility in Deer Lodge was closed down and women were kept at the Powell County Jail in Deer Lodge until July of 1977.

Records do not show any female inmates at MSP after 1977, when the new prison opened. From 1977 through 1982, the Missoula Life Skills Training Center, located at Fort Missoula, was an option used for

housing women inmates. Women inmates were housed with other residents including parolees, probationers, and furloughees. The Billings Life Skills Center was opened in February, 1978, and provided a Minimum security facility for 12 inmates. Both Missoula and Billings Life Skills provided only Minimum security. The increasing women inmate population included individuals requiring tighter security and it outgrew available beds.

The decision to develop a system of pre-release centers for male inmates eliminated the possibility of housing women in Missoula. No additional female inmates were admitted in 1982.

Some women were housed out-of-state in California, West Virginia, Nebraska and other locations during this period (1977 to 1982) due to lack of facilities. During fiscal year 1982, Montana women inmates also were being housed at Galen, and in the Missoula, Powell, Gallatin and Lake County jails.

During the 1981 Legislative session, the total women offender population reached 37. The Legislature authorized funding for 41 women offenders for the 1983 biennium and they recognized a need for a women's prison. The Legislature rejected a proposal to remodel a vacant cottage at the Mountain View School for housing women offenders, but appropriated funds and directed the Department of Institutions to locate another site for the facility and submit it to the Legislative Finance Committee for approval.

The temporary site selected was a vacant nurses' dormitory located on the campus of Warm Springs State Hospital. This facility was modified to increase security and received the first resident on May 6, 1982. The design capacity of the Women's Correctional Center at Warm Springs is 30. The emergency bed capacity is 45.

In order to temporarily ease overcrowding, the 1989 Legislature authorized funds to remodel a vacant unit on the Warm Springs campus. The former MSH Forensic Unit will hold an additional 15 inmates and should be ready approximately October, 1989. Five spaces in the Intensive Supervision Program also will be reserved for female offenders. The total expanded capacity will be 75.

The 1989 Legislature has commissioned the Department of Institutions and the Criminal Justice and Corrections Advisory Council to develop a comprehensive plan for housing adult female inmates. The plan must:

    "...consider the need for building a new correctional facility, as well as other incarceration alternatives;

provide for adequate educational, treatment, training, and employment opportunities for female inmates;

comply with standards published by the American Correctional Association's Commission on Accreditation for Corrections, whenever feasible; and,

contain proposed legislation for implementing the plan, if appropriate."

## HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHICS

Prior to Statehood in 1889, only two women were admitted to prison, one in 1878 and one in 1879. Both were in their twenties, one was listed as Mexican/Spanish and the other had no ethnicity listed. Their crimes were manslaughter and murder. Both were from Missoula County and neither listed an occupation.

From Statehood in 1889 to 1910, there were 60 women admitted to prison (average of 2.7 per year). Forty-five of the sixty (75%) were in their twenties (24) and thirties (21), nine were teenagers, and the remainder in their forties (4) and fifties (2). The nationalities were not listed for twenty-seven of the women, but twenty-three were listed as Negro or Mulatto with the remainder (10) or the women of European descent.

Thirty of the sixty crimes of these women were Grand Larceny (50%), and six were Burglary (10%); there were thirteen offenses of Manslaughter, Murder (2) and Robbery (21%); nine Assaults of four variations (15%); and the balance Arson, Bigamy and Blackmail.

Only fifteen counties contributed to the women's prison population from 1889 to 1910, with one-third from Silverbow County. Missoula, Lewis and Clark and Deer Lodge Counties together contributed another third. Beaverhead, Cascade, Choteau, Fergus, Gallatin, Granite, Jefferson, Park, Teton, and Yellowstone Counties contributed the last third, with no more than three admissions from any one of those counties.

Of the occupations listed, demi-monde accounted for one-third of the admissions (20). Demi-monde is a Victorian-European phrase for a "kept woman", denoting the "half-world" or fringes of respectable society, in this case meaning prostitute. There were six dressmakers, five cooks, five streetwalkers, and four housewives, three domestics, two housekeepers, two sporting women and one sporting women keeper, and the remainder were a candy store clerk, a milliner, a laundress, a ranch woman, a servant, a teacher, a waitress, a storekeeper and a capitalist.

The term housewife did not appear until 1902, and only three women had an unlisted or unknown occupation.

From 1911 to 1943, there were 126 admissions (average of 3.8 per year). Sixty-nine percent of these women were in their twenties (45) and thirties (42), nineteen percent (25) were in their forties, eight were teenagers, five women were in their fifties and one in her sixties. The youngest woman imprisoned was 15 years old and was given a Life sentence for "luring a man to his death". Records were not kept on nationality or ethnicity in this period.

Twenty-five percent of the crimes of this period were Grand Larceny and compared to fifty percent in the period before. Burglary, Stolen Goods, and Forgery accounted for another thirteen percent. Another 24 crimes (19%) were Manslaughter, Murder and Robbery (slightly less than from 1889 to 1910). Possession of drugs appears for the first time in 1923 and continues until 1935, and selling drugs is listed from 1928 to 1935. In 1921, legislation was passed regarding sale of the drugs of opium and coca leaves and their derivatives, and in 1923, legislation was passed regarding possession. Possession and Selling Drugs together compose the second largest crime category for this period (23%). The remaining crimes were Arson (5), Assault (5), Assist Escape (2), Bigamy (4), Felony (2), Injury to Public Jail (1), Obtaining Money Under False Pretenses (1), Rape (2), and Sedition (1).

In this period, thirty-four counties contributed to the population of women in prison. Silverbow County contributed 21% compared to 33% in the prior period. Cascade County contributed 13% and Yellowstone County contributed 11%. Gallatin and Lewis and Clark Counties each contributed 7%. The remaining contribution counties were Beaverhead, Big Horn, Blaine, Carter, Custer, Deer Lodge, Fallon, Fergus, Flathead, Glacier, Granite, Hill, Lake, Madison, Meagher, Missoula, Musselshell, Park, Phillips, Pondera, Powell, Rosebud, Roosevelt, Sanders, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Teton, Toole, and Valley; each contributing four or less inmates per county.

The occupational categories of female inmates expanded during this time period from 18 to 23. Demi-monde was not used after 1918 and included only three from 1911 to 1918. Just about half of the women listed "housewife" as their occupation in this period. There were 10 waitresses, 8 cooks, and 7 nurses, and the remaining occupations were: actress, beet worker, cashier, chambermaid, dressmaker, entertainer, farmeress, file clerk, hairdresser, hotel keeper, house servant, inn keeper, laundress, music teacher, proof reader, rooming house keeper, student and theatrical worker.

Montana State Prison historical records provide a count of women inmates since July 1943. From 1943 to 1969, the women inmate population never exceeded 17 inmates. The average population was usually fewer than 10, with an average yearly population ranging from 4 to 13.5. Other demographic data was unavailable.

#### SOURCES

Rich Petaja, "Women Inmate Population (Historical)", 10/17/88.

Interview with Elaine Way at the Deer Lodge Prison Museum; historical information extracted from prison logs.